

NSC BRIEFING

14 January 1954

INDOCHINA

I. Situation at Dien Bien Phu:

- A. The French garrison of 11,000 at Dien Bien Phu is surrounded by Viet Minh units totaling 24,000, who French expect will attack any time after 15 January.

II. French forces:

- A. 12 French battalions include:
1. 4 French Legion battalions.
 2. 3 Algerian battalions.
 3. 1 Moroccan battalion.
 4. 2 Thai battalions.
 5. 2 Vietnamese battalions.
- B. These battalions include the following support units:

1. Armor.
 - a. 10 light tanks.
2. Artillery (3 battalions).
 - a. 20 105-mm howitzers.
 - b. 4 155-mm howitzers.
 - c. 12 75-mm guns.

III. Supply: The French are entirely dependent on air supply, now totaling 70-100 sorties per day. This airlift is conservatively estimated at over 200 tons per day.

A. Requirements.

1. Non-combat situation - 83 tons per day.
2. Combat situation - 140 tons per day.

B. Stocks on hand as of 4 January.

1. 6 days' rations.
2. 15 days' clothing.
3. 6 days' fuel.
4. 1,200 tons barbed wire.
5. 30 days' ammunition.

C. With good weather French believed able to meet all airlift requirements at Dien Bien Phu and all air-supplied bases in Laos under full combat conditions for two weeks. After that, capability would decrease because of lack of crews and maintenance personnel. Approaching crachin season (fog and drizzle) will hamper takeoffs from Tonkin delta but will not affect Dien Bien Phu.

IV. Viet Minh forces.

A. In immediate vicinity of Dien Bien Phu.

1. 19 infantry battalions.
2. All first-line troops. Each equal in fire power to a French battalion.

B. Expected in area by 15 January.

1. 9 infantry battalions.
2. 4 artillery battalions.
 - a. 20 75-mm artillery pieces.
 - b. 16 105-mm howitzer pieces.

C. Supply - adequate to support 14 days of full offensive operations.

V. French believed to have good prospects of holding base. French admit possibility of Viet Minh by-passing Dien Bien Phu and invading northern Laos.

VI. French forces in northern Laos. Probable objectives would be the royal capital at Luang Prabang, the administrative capital at Vientiane or the important French base at Xieng Khouang.

A. Luang Prabang sector has 7 infantry battalions totaling 5,000 troops. There is no artillery or armored units.

1. 1 Foreign Legion battalion.
2. 1 French army battalion.
3. 1 Moroccan battalion.
4. 4 Laotian battalions.

B. Xieng Khouang sector has 4 infantry battalions totaling 2,500 troops. No artillery or armor.

1. 1 Foreign Legion battalion.
2. 1 French army battalion.
3. 2 Laotian battalions.

C. Vientiane-Paksane sector has 5
infantry battalions totaling 4,000
troops. No artillery or armored
units.

1. 1 Foreign Legion battalion.
2. 1 French army battalion.
3. 3 Laotian battalions.

VII. The supply situation in northern Laos
is satisfactory under present conditions.
Stocks will last for one month without
additional airlift. Airlift capability
will be strained by late February if
Mekong line of communications now cut
at Thakhek is not opened, or if Bangkok
refuses permission to move supplies
through northeastern Thailand.

VIII. Insignificant number of Viet Minh now in northern Laos. Commitment of substantial forces from the Dien Bien Phu area would require that the French airlift major reinforcements to these posts. French ability to transfer sufficient troops to meet a threat in Laos would depend on the situation in the Tonkin delta and elsewhere.

IX. Situation in central Laos. The Viet Minh thrust from northern Annam into central Laos which cut Mekong River line of communications precipitated reinforcement of French garrison there.

A. French forces at Seno-Savannakhet number 20,000 (24 infantry battalions).

1. 2 Foreign Legion battalions
(1 parachute).
2. 3 French army battalions (all
parachute).
3. 2 Algerian battalions.
4. 7 Moroccan battalions.
5. 4 Laotian battalions.
6. 3 Vietnamese battalions (1
parachute).
7. 3 Cambodian battalions (under
French command).

B. Armor and artillery.

1. 2 French colonial 105-mm
howitzer artillery battalions.
2. 12 light tanks.

C. Supply situation - road to south
open. Airlift working satisfac-
torily. Supplies on hand sufficient
for 20 days.

X. French forces at Tchepone-Muong Phine
sector - 1,750.

A. 3 infantry battalions.

1. 1 Moroccan battalion.

2. 2 Laotian battalions.

B. No armor or artillery.

C. Supply situation not considered
critical.

XI. Viet Minh forces in the area total
7 battalions north of Seno. There are
unconfirmed reports of the movement of
additional forces of unknown strength
from the Vinh area in northern Annam
toward central Laos.

XII. The preponderance of French strength over that of enemy makes a serious attack on Seno-Savannakhet unlikely. The French are now, in fact, counter-attacking. Logistic support is a major problem for the Viet Minh because its troops in the area are so far from their base at Vinh and depend on coolies for transportation.

XIII. Situation in southern Laos.

A. This region has been quiet but there have been recent unconfirmed reports that two Viet Minh regiments have moved from southern Annam in the direction of Pakse. French forces there include two battalions of Laotian infantry. But the French are capable of quickly reinforcing this garrison if sufficient mobile reserves are available at the time of an attack.

XIV. French Mobile Reserves: There are a total of 34 mobile battalions located in Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina. Of these, 23 are considered ready to move. The others are in various stages of readiness for commitment to threatened areas.

A. Mobile forces in Tonkin - 19 battalions; of these, 15 are ready to move.

1. 6 Mobile groups (3 battalions each).

2. 1 Parachute battalion (in training).

B. Mobile forces in Annam - 4 mobile groups totaling 11 battalions. Three of these comprising 8 battalions are ready to move.

- C. Mobile forces in Cochinchina -
 - 4 battalions. None considered now ready to move.
 - 1. 1 Mobile group (3 battalions).
 - 2. 1 Parachute battalion.
- D. Withdrawal of a significant number of these units from their present locations, particularly from the Tonkin delta, would seriously increase French security problems in these areas.